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ABSTRACT

The improvement of personnel preparation programs for the education of the handicapped is addressed in this statement. The task of schools, colleges, and departments of education engaged in the preparation of professional educators will be to design training programs responsive to the new emphasis upon education for all people despite varying physical and mental capabilities. (JD)

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Beyond The Mandate: The Professional Imperative

Educating Professionals for Educating the Handicapped

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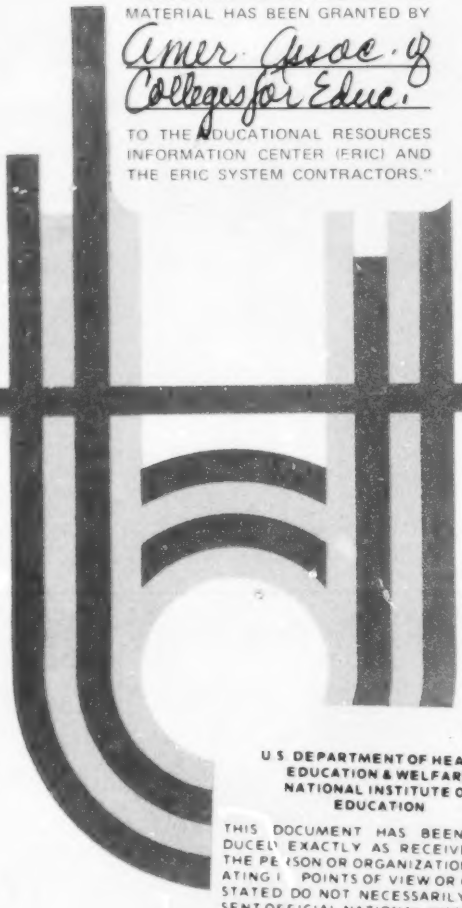

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AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES FOR TEACHERS EDUCATION

BEYOND THE MANDATE: THE PROFESSIONAL IMPERATIVE

Educating Professionals for Educating the Handicapped

Introduction

This statement reflects the Association's commitment to the advocacy of equal opportunity, unlimited access, unconditional acceptance, and total responsiveness to individual differences. Specifically, it addresses the improvement of personnel preparation programs for the education of the handicapped. Fundamentally, however, it is about opening doors of opportunity to all persons with individual differences, whatever their nature.

The statement had its genesis in the deliberations of the AACTE Board of Directors, discussions with the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped, activities of the AACTE/Teacher Corps Staff Development Project, and in the recommendations of an AACTE study committee chaired by Dean Corrigan, University of Maryland.

A special Association Task Force on Education of the Handicapped, working closely with the AACTE Commission on Programs and Projects, developed the text of the statement which was then adopted by the Board of Directors.

It is presented here in the interest of improving the quality of educational personnel preparation programs, and ultimately, the quality of education for all American children and youth.

Text of the Statement

Our profession has a continuing commitment to improve the quality of education. This commitment is exemplified by our advocacy of equal opportunity, unlimited access, unconditional acceptance, and total responsiveness to individual differences. Our support for the education of all exceptional individuals is not simply an endorsement of a mandate which is the culmination of a singular struggle in behalf of a neglected minority; it is a present part of our continuing quest for quality education to maximize the potential of each individual.

The mandate implicit in recent court decisions and legislation serves as still another catalyst for evolutionary change, one which can ultimately guarantee the rights of all children and youth to an appropriate education. The importance of this mandate centers on the inequities which it corrects. Its significance is also embedded in the nature of responses required of educators, parents, and the general public. Without substantive changes in attitudes, in instructional programming, and in the priorities for allocating resources, this movement will neither benefit the individuals it is intended to serve, nor have an impact on the larger society.

New Perspectives

Broad, pervasive societal-educational changes are needed if the potential of each individual is to be realized. A new way of viewing people is needed, one which de-emphasizes competition along narrow uni-dimensional lines and provides instead for the recognition of individual worth in multifaceted ways. A new approach to the identification of disabilities is required, one which is seen as a means of providing resources adequate to the needs of all individuals, rather than a system for categorizing persons which fractionalizes society while ignoring the values

of diversity. A new perspective on handicaps is essential, one which recognizes the specific relevance of the disability to a particular task, rather than perceiving it as generic and exclusionary. A new definition of schooling is mandated, one which regards the learning environment and the school task toward which it is directed in *individual* terms rather than one which focuses on cognitive, too-exclusively abstract, language-based skills. A new concept of education is implied, one which assumes that all educators and society at large share a commitment to developing and maintaining optimum learning environments for every individual from birth through adulthood; education is not the isolated responsibility of a sequence of teachers, each confined to a classroom in a school building for a predetermined span of time.

Professional Roles

Such a concept of education requires a modification of existing professional roles as well as the creation of new roles. The professional educator will need to be a person with new skills, attitudes, and personal qualities—a person who is a non-traditional thinker, one who is a change agent, a conserver of human resources, one who values knowledge production. His/her orientation will be dynamic, based on a continuing renewal concept of knowledge, attitude, and behavior acquisition. This professional is an accepting person—capable of giving unconditional acceptance to students' differences, as well as recognition to the contributions of parents and others who share responsibility for a child's education. He/she is trained as a member of a differentiated instructional team, able to utilize both human and technological resources, able to function as a team member—sometimes in a leadership role, other times as a supportive observer, sometimes as a catalyst, and other times as a consumer of technical assistance.

Educational System

The educational system in which this professional educator will function will be expanded at both the pre- and post-school levels, and it will be more highly individualized. The extension of education below age five will provide opportunities for early identification of potential disabilities, the reduction of environmentally-imposed handicaps, and partial elimination of educational handicaps, by means of quality instructional intervention. The extension of education at the post-secondary level will enable schools to rethink the basic skills as those essential for survival and concerned with the quality of life, and to redefine program completion in terms of competency acquisition.

The development of individual educational plans can also increase the quality of education along several already existing lines while adding new dimensions to them: 1) from infrequent testing designed for comparing students' performance to continuous evaluation utilized for monitoring the learner's progress; 2) from arbitrarily imposed grade levels to actual entry levels of performance; 3) from static, stratified pupil placement based on a single data source to dynamic, varied placements determined by many observations of individual strengths and weaknesses; 4) from instructional programs whose objective is the presentation of knowledge, to those which require accountability based on impact; 5) from narrow academic programs to those which offer a full range of enrichment and supportive services; 6) from unilateral decisions regarding placement and program, to parent/professional-group decisions resulting in shared responsibility for the learner's total needs. These emphases on improving education for the handicapped will ultimately result in the improvement of education for *all* children.

Personnel Preparation Programs

The task of schools, colleges, and departments of education engaged in the preparation of professional educators will be to design training programs responsive to these new emphases. They will need to address, among others, several major issues: expanding the life space of preservice programs to provide room for new competencies and well integrated field experiences; revitalizing inservice education programs to make them more responsive to the needs of school personnel; reconceptualizing the nature of professional roles; developing curricula in which the concept of individualization is another strand to be woven into the fabric of teacher education, rather than a new patch applied to its worn exterior; modeling cross-departmental/inter-disciplinary approaches to planning, teaching, research, and service. In solving the problems raised by these issues, cooperation with others outside the college of education will be imperative with the university at large, school personnel, teacher centers, teacher organizations, and state departments of education.

In order to accommodate handicapped applicants in the education professions, colleges will need to develop new policies for admission, counseling, and placement, all aimed at providing full access while at the same time maintaining rigorous quality control. Also, institutions of higher learning will need to provide support for cooperative knowledge-base building, which recognizes research and development activities aimed at the improvement of practice. Above all, teacher educators will need to model the kinds of accepting behavior they seek to develop in professional education personnel.

In order to provide quality instruction for all children through professionals prepared by colleges of education, PROGRAMS TODAY AND IN THE FUTURE MUST ASSURE THAT:

- the instructional problems encountered in the transition to the least restrictive alternative model are recognized as researchable questions meriting the investment of effort by the broad community of educational researchers;
- the broadened range of tasks resulting from the inclusion of the handicapped as a primary responsibility of regular education is understood as having implications for the training of all educators;
- the growing body of literature relating to the identification and education of the handicapped and their families is accessible to all preservice students and members of the practicing profession;
- all graduates of professional education programs who enter the field are knowledgeable about the rights of all children inclusive of the handicapped and are prepared to assume their professional role in implementing the due process procedures evolving from legislation;
- necessary support systems for expanded programs are provided: barrier-free buildings, increased library facilities, additional media resources;
- opportunities for professional renewal are made available to all members of the education community, including faculty of institutions of higher education, through planned staff development programs;
- programs for preparation of education professionals are designed to reflect a broadened human services orientation, emphasizing the link between parents and professionals and the necessity of coordinated team effort.

The educational community's response is based on the premise that the isolation of any group erodes the social cement needed to transform an aggregation of individuals into a society. While the mandate for the education of all the handicapped is based on a civil rights imperative, the magnitude of the task implicit in the spirit of this mandate presents an unparalleled opportunity for growth.

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